

Northern Mirror

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P. 8

March, 1996

An award winning reflection of Alaskan life

Volume 4, Issue 3

Circulation 6,000



Craftsman turns leather into art

BY PAT O'HARA
Northern Mirror

For Ken Leavitt, it all began with a hole in his jeans. Back in the '60s, he was a young art student at Laney Community College in Oakland, California, without much money, sharing a garage for \$10 a month. A friend of his had some leather scraps and tools lying around, so Leavitt made a patch for his jeans. From there, he moved on to wallets and pouches. Pretty soon, people started coming to him with requests for leather goods.

He's been wrestling with the dilemma of balancing artistic expression with the pragmatic needs of making a living ever since. His compromise has been what he calls, "three-dimensional, useable art, wearable art, everyday art."

His body of work ranges from glove-soft bags, purses and backpacks, fringed ponchos, jackets and elegant

See LEATHER, Page 3

Extreme skiers challenge dramatic chutes and gullies

BY DEBRA McGHAN
Northern Mirror

Kim Reichhelm climbed from the helicopter, her skis and poles in hand, and sucked in a breath of clean, crisp, mountain air. She dropped her skis to the snow and stepped into them, snapping the bindings to her boots. All around her brilliant, blue skies framed a startling background for the Chugach Mountains near Valdez, Alaska. A panoramic sea of rugged, white mountain peaks spreading out in every direction.

Surprisingly, as Reichhelm stood on the edge of that steep, jagged mountain peak preparing to launch her body off the top, a quiet calm washed over her. She didn't think about the fact that she would soon head directly down the mountain slope, relying only on the skill and training she had gained through a life time of alpine skiing to get her safely but dramatically to the bottom. She didn't consider that today was the final day of the 5th annual World Extreme Skiing Championships, and with a perfect run she could still capture the

See VALDEZ, Page 14

Alaskan history provides gold in literary form

BY PAT O'HARA
Northern Mirror

Ron Wendt was just looking to get his gas money back and have some fun when he published his first book, "An Alaskan Diary: in Search of Gold." He did have fun and to his surprise, made a little money. For Wendt, the self-publishing business has paid off, and this month he's bringing his 11th book on the market, "Strange, Amazing! True Tales of Alaska."

The stories are like the old Jack London tales, says Wendt, but true. "A lot of weird stories people have told me, several Alaska gold rush ghosts."

All of Wendt's titles (and there's some great titles: "Gold, Ghost Towns and Grizzlies" and "Golden Paystreaks & Boiled Mooseheads") explore the lore of Alaska in simple little books that are easy to read and inexpensive to buy. "Alaska sells," says Wendt.

The key to success for self-publishers, says Wendt, who made enough money to quit a steady job two years ago for full-time writing, "is to get in a market where nobody else is, a niche."

Wendt's extensive knowledge of Alaskan

history and his own experiences growing up on a homestead outside of Fairbanks have created that special niche. He sells his books up and down the West Coast, in the gift shop circuit and recently contracted with a distributor to market on the East Coast. Wendt has also developed a following among prospectors Outside in California, Arizona and Washington.

To keep his overhead low and stay out of debt, Wendt and his wife Bonnie lay out the pages, take them to the printer, B&B Printing in Wasilla, and then assemble and staple the copies themselves. Usually, he only prints a few books initially, around 2,000, to see if they will sell. "Where a lot of people make their mistake is they print 5,000 or 10,000 copies and go broke." The books are small enough to fit in a pocket or purse and cheap enough so you get change back from a \$10 bill.

Although some months are lean, others, like last May, when \$11,000 in orders rolled in, are bonanzas. "I can take \$5,000 and get a return of \$25,000," says Wendt about his self-publishing business, now operating under the name of Goldstream Publications. Between maga-

See WENDT, Page 12

The Mystery of the Ruby Gulch Killings

Gold prospector Frank Sandstrom and his stepfather, John Hill, had been mining in the Dutch Hills on upper Willow Creek in the Cache Creek mining district in 1939. They had taken out about 11 ounces of gold for the summer.

John Clark, the claim owner, had made a deal for them to mine on the claims he owned, but it was a sour deal. Clark was shrewd, and didn't have many friends. He was having a spat with the Jenkins' camp over on Ruby Gulch, but who wasn't? Jenkins had already been to court with gold miner Dick Francis because he accused Francis of piling up tailings on his claim. Jenkins won the court case and Francis wasn't happy with the results.

John Clark had been an officer in the Canadian military years before and according to Sandstrom, he had a strangeness about him that rubbed others the wrong way.

John Hill was not happy with Clark's arrangement on the mining claims. And it

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Northern Mirror

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Letter from the Staff

The Northern Mirror is still open. Like many Valley businesses, we've experienced setbacks over the winter, and this month rumors were circulating that we were closing our doors. However, the support and concern from the community has been very strong, and we refuse to call it quits.

The staff of the Northern Mirror is still committed to providing an excellent monthly publication for our readers. We will continue to produce in-depth features highlighted by excellent photography about people and events in the Valley that you won't find covered anywhere else. The Valley provides a wealth of interesting stories from the historic to the heroic that deserve to be told.

Look for a free copy of The Northern Mirror in our new red racks at major outlets. We also have a stand in Eagle River. And if you want to give the folks back home a glimpse of Alaskan life, be sure to sign up for a subscription. We mail out of state.

During the next year, we aim to boost circulation and distribution. In June, we will produce our first issue of The Best of the Northern Mirror, a full-color, glossy magazine with some of our award-winning stories of the past two years.

Thanks to our readers and advertisers for sticking by us. See you around town.

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LEATHER

Continued from Front

dresses — all hand-stitched — to wall hangings, sculptures and standing sticks. He still calls the business he started in 1975 Talkeetna Leather Works even though he moved the small log cabin that houses his shop to Wasilla two years ago. Anybody who knows him, says the master leathersmith, “when they see my stuff on the street, they recognize it.”

His interest in art began to flourish in his junior year of high school during what he calls a period of personal renaissance. He started playing the harmonica, played football and lacrosse and met an art teacher who, he says, “really encouraged me that I had an aptitude in painting and sculpting.”

His first show, when he was still an idealistic young high school artist, brought with it a rude awakening. A woman liked his paintings so much that she commissioned one for the house she and her husband were renovating. When Leavitt asked her what she would like, her answer took him by surprise. “I really don’t care as long as it matches my rug,” she told him.

“I did the painting, but I wasn’t very enthusiastic about it,” says Leavitt. The whole incident, he says, left a bad taste in his mouth “with this thing about art and money.”

Still, he decided to pursue art and eventually wound up in San Francisco in 1967. About the same time he was patching his jeans with leather scraps, Leavitt became disillusioned with college. “What I realized was college wasn’t preparing me for life or how to live.”

He discovered he could earn a simple living with some basic tools: scissors, a hole punch and a ruler. “I could throw a roll of leather in my backpack and sit down to make something and somebody would buy it. I can’t say it was always a goal to make a living by my craft, but it’s always been possible.”

But Leavitt didn’t start working leather because it was so “in” at the time, he says. “Leather became a medium I just really liked.” A peripatetic lifestyle took Leavitt to Europe in the early 70s, back to the United States where he lived in Key West for awhile and then to Alaska because, he says, “it was the next place to come.”

He hitchhiked north and wound up in Chase, living in a Visqueen teepee. But, says Leavitt, “you can’t make any money living out in the woods.”

So he went down to Talkeetna, and in exchange for free rent, agreed to remove the Dave Lawrence cabin, built in 1918, from where it stood behind what is now Village Arts & Crafts. He took the cabin apart log by log and reassembled it on Main Street a few months later. The cabin, which in its life has now been moved four times, became Leavitt’s first home. Leavitt started his business with scrap leather and lived in his shop.

In 1978, the principal of a private school invited him to give a mini-course in leather working. Bearded and wearing leather leggings, a real Talkeetna man, Leavitt walked into the school and met Miss Mary Davis. “The first thing I noticed about her was she didn’t have a wedding ring.”

They married a year later and moved into the cabin. The business grew slowly. Mary homeschooled the children while Leavitt ran the shop. (The father of three girls and two boys ranging in age from 16 to 2, Leavitt says he loves being a dad.) But even during the pipeline

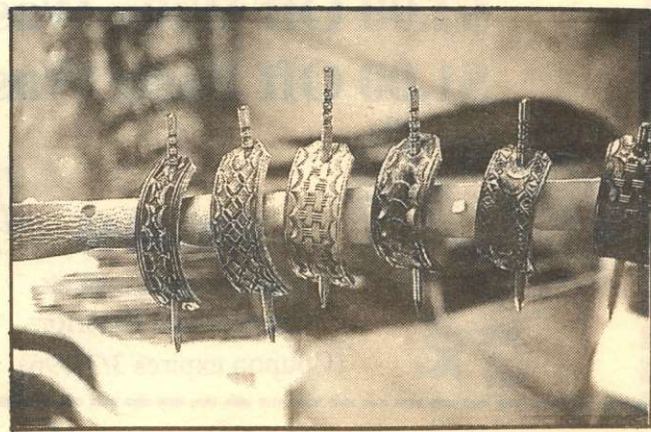
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Photos by Ron Caldwell



Clockwise from upper right: Ken Leavitt creates one-of-a-kind leather garments in his Wasilla shop; Karena Harrell models a beaded, fringed poncho; Leavitt individually tools an array of leather barrettes; Leavitt prefers to hand punch and hand stitch all his work; an exquisite bone-colored bag trimmed in sea-foam braid and a beaded feather design is on display next to a pair of beautiful mukluks.



BUSINESS

A successful business plan must be able to change with the variances of a company's growth

BY KAY SLACK
Northern Mirror

The most difficult decision a business has to make is that of going out of business. All the time, energy and money invested in the endeavor must be weighed carefully against projections for the future. Just how long can a company continue to operate before it realizes sustained growth and a return on the investment?

Quitting a business is an emotional event. When the business was born, there was great expectation. The long hours and little pay was no match for the enthusiasm and undying hope of success. As time wore on, though, doubts set in making it harder to continue the same level of commitment. The decision to "do something" becomes the most important object of our attention. What you should really look at is whether or not the business has the potential to satisfy your financial needs.

If you prepared a business plan when you started the business, take it out and compare your actual income and expenses against the projection from the plan. Note any significant areas where you strayed from the original plan. Did you add personnel costs that were not in the plan? If so, did your rates, prices or sales volume increase to cover this extra cost? Revise your original plan to reflect what is happening in the business today. Then, carefully analyze the results to determine whether the business is satisfying your financial needs. For those who did not prepare a business plan, this is a good time to do so.

A business plan is not a stationary item. Successful businesses rework their plan often, making necessary changes throughout the life of the company. What a lot of people find is that preparing or updating a business plan can be as exciting as starting up a new business. There is a whole world of opportunities. Your business may even change its entire focus to take advantage of new market conditions.

There are several ways to approach your business planning needs. One is to go out and buy a book or a computer software program that takes you through the steps. The good ones will explain what is needed for each section of the plan, give examples and ask questions for you to answer. Do not be intimidated by a book or program that you do not understand. Just get one that makes sense to you. There are a variety of products on the market and not all of them are good. So, if it does not make sense to you — don't buy it.

Another way to do your business plan is to hire a consultant. When hiring someone for this type of work, it is important to remember who's business plan this is! If you are not willing to be a major contributor to the plan, you might as well not spend your hard-earned money on a consultant. Too many times, a plan is prepared by someone outside the company, and it ends up sitting on the shelf collecting dust.

Hiring a consultant does not have to be

See PLANNING, Page 13

COMPUTERS

Plan your spring and summer home improvements on your personal computer

BY SHERRY WILSON
Northern Mirror

Now is the time to start thinking about those spring and summer home improvement projects. The best way to start any project is to spend some time in the planning stage. Your home computer can help you with your planning.

You might like to build a greenhouse, a storage shed or rearrange your home furnishings while doing your spring cleaning. It is so much easier to move furnishings with your computer mouse than with your back. So how is it your computer can assist with these kinds of home improvement projects?

There are many different software application programs on the market today that are perfect for such endeavors. The thing to remember in choosing software for a given project is to keep it simple. It is unnecessary to purchase a program that is high powered, commercially used with a high learning curve. Who wants to spend a year learning a software program to do a small home improvement project? Not to mention the expense of such software programs.

The best software programs for such projects are those that are highly interactive. This means a Window-based program with lots of icon buttons with pictures. This makes it easy to draw pictures for planning your project. Your program should make it easy to drag and drop all

sorts of items and place them where you want them on your drawing. You will want a program that has its own clip art library associated with the program.

If you want to rearrange your living room furnishings, the software program you choose should have a library for home furnishings for you to choose from. Want to design your own greenhouse and then see it in 3-D? This kind of software program is more powerful. The more powerful a software program, the more costly it is and the more time it will take to learn. You may be one of those lucky families that has young people at home. Unleash their creativity abilities by giving them an opportunity to plan and design home improvement projects using a PC.

Just remember, plan early and keep it simple!

Program Options

AutoCAD LT - High end program with advanced capabilities for professional designers. Publisher: Autodesk
Design Your Own Home Suite - A package of five programs for homeowners. Complete with landscaping, furniture arrangements and interior decor choices. Publisher: Abracadata
WinDraft - Easy to use drawing and drafting program for creating technical illustrations. Publisher: Innovative Data Design

Sherry Wilson performs computer aided design work for Omni Computers

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Husky smuggling operation on board the S.S. Puppy Express

BY PAT O'HARA
Northern Mirror

If Kiana had been an oil well, we'd be millionaires today. Instead, she was a sweet-natured, silver and white, blue-eyed husky with a propensity to propagate. But I always thought there was fur-lined gold glittering in Kiana's fruitful uterus. I was almost right.

What follows is the story of some of Kiana's fuzzy offspring, a dashing chief mate, a lonely, able-bodied seaman and the brief but glorious run of the SeaLand container ship they called the S.S. Puppy Express.

The story begins, as so many of our stories do, with Lloyd. For 20 years before he moved to Alaska, Lloyd had worked as a landscaper. At heart, Lloyd was a man of the soil. He loved turning the earth, dropping seeds into the little mounds of dirt, weeding the soldierly straight rows on a cool Alaskan summer morning.

Every winter, he'd save up all the manure off his dog lot, spread it over a patch of land the size of the Willow airport and grow wheelbarrows of zucchini you could have used for baseball bats. (Then he turned around and gave it to us and everybody else who stopped by to visit since he and Lil could never have eaten that much zucchini in this lifetime or the next. I particularly liked those times when the zucchini came already baked in Lil's famous zucchini bread.)

A red rototiller, the best John Deere sells, would make that garden just about perfect, Lloyd decided. And he knew just where he could get one cheap, in Seattle. Except the shipping costs would wipe out the savings for buying out of state. That's

where the handsome chief mate, Mike, the man who came to Alaska to marry me, comes in.

For a while, Mike worked for SeaLand as a chief mate on the Anchorage- Seattle run aboard the S.S. Galveston. Once every ten days, the Galveston left Pier 5 in Seattle, headed north for a 36-hour turn around and then made the return trip, which took about five days.

Why couldn't Mike bring up the rototiller on one of those north-bound runs, Lloyd reasoned, and save him a bunch of money. Mike could, but bringing a 1,000-pound rototiller aboard ship while no one was looking required a little finesse. This is where the puppies come in.

One of the longshoremen, who was also a crane operator, had a hankering for a blue-eyed Alaskan puppy. Mike made him a deal. (Deals always figured prominently in any project involving Lloyd.) On his lunch hour, so he wouldn't violate the union contract, the longshoreman would start up the Gantry crane that reaches 150 feet into the sky, normally used to load 30-ton containers, and hoist, by contrast, the itsy-bitsy rototiller box, about 6 feet tall

and 2 feet wide, onto the deck. In exchange, Mike promised him a roly-poly, wooly, blue-eyed puppy guaranteed to melt the hearts of his wife and kids.

Mike could make this promise because Kiana was in heat again and the odds were that the latest breeding pen Mike had built

for her wasn't any match for her passionate nature — or the neighbor's Samoyed. One year, Kiana actually couldn't figure out a way to escape, but Kobuk found a way in and stayed in about three weeks.

One thing you could always say about Kiana: she may have been a little cerebrally-

challenged, her legs were too short to pull a sled and she liked her cats raw on the half shell, but she threw beautiful, bountiful litters. She did, after all, take home a blue ribbon for Most Beautiful in the annual Mat-Su Humane Society Pet Show. Like clockwork, she'd come into heat, Mike would fortify the breeding pen with moat trenches and razor wire along the top to keep her confined and two months later, we'd go out to feed her breakfast and there would be faint mewling and crying sounds coming from her dog house. Eight to 10

tiny, wriggly bodies trying to nurse.

Kiana was a good mom and always let her pups get as round and fat as little pork sausages. Their diminutive faces, topped with perky, pointy ears, looked as if an artist's brush had feathered tiny raccoon masks around their startling, glacier-blue eyes. Fair exchange for ten minutes of a crane operator's lunch hour, even at union wages.

There are many legal ways to transport a puppy from Anchorage to Seattle; however, the inside coat pocket of your down parka aboard a container ship is not one of them. But Mike, after all, was chief mate and who was going to ask him about that bulge in his jacket when he walked up the gangplank? At first, Mike kept the puppy in his room and fed him from the ship's galley, which always served steak on Sundays.

The problem started when the bo's'n (sailor talk for boatswain) walked into Mike's office looking for extra work and found a puppy sleeping under the desk. He started coming a little earlier each time to play with the puppy and one day, brought along a salty old sailor named Charlie. This is where the lonely, able-bodied seaman comes in.

Well into his 60s, Charlie had spent most of life at sea, sailing eight or nine months a year and living in a waterfront hotel when he was ashore. With no family or permanent home, Charlie immediately took a paternal interest in the little dog. One afternoon, Mike came back to his room and found the puppy gone. He searched the ship

See PUPPY, Page 6

Their diminutive faces, topped with perky, pointy ears, looked as if an artist's brush had feathered tiny raccoon masks around their startling, glacier-blue eyes.



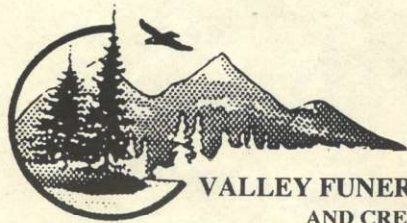
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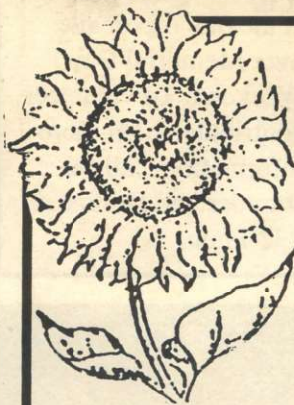


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Photos courtesy of Karl Schleich

The Wasilla High School cafeteria sounded like Scrooge McDuck's vault as over 70 children, ages 2-17, delivered, dropped, arranged and covered the floor with \$1,000 worth of pennies for the Wasilla Wonderland Playground. Organizer Lucy Hope was pleased to see so many people with so many pennies. "A pre-schooler came in with a juice can filled with pennies and right behind her was borough assembly member Scott Sterling with a large pickle jar filled with pennies."



Students from local middle and high schools were on hand to roll and count the pennies. Colony High students Bryan Doyle and Jason Palenske returned the following day to continue the task. Wasilla Wonderland is an all-volunteer effort to build an extensive playground at the old airport site over Memorial Day Weekend. To volunteer, contribute or get more information, call the Wonderland Hotline at 232-Funn.

PUPPY

Continued from Page 5

high and low imagining the worst: the puppy had been sucked up by an intake valve in the engine room and was now a red spot on the floor.

Meanwhile, two decks down, Charlie had brought the puppy to his room. He feared the puppy wasn't getting enough to eat and had swiped a few extra steak bones from Sunday dinner. Mike finally caught up with the two of them and made yet another deal.

Since Charlie was really too old for most of the deck jobs available, Mike offered him overtime pay to take care of the puppy. Mike was satisfied since he wouldn't have to listen to the puppy yelping at night, Charlie was happy because, for a short while he would have a friend, albeit a four-legged one, and the puppy was delirious with visions of steak bones squared to infinity dancing in his fleecy little head.

The crane operator was waiting on the dock when the S.S. Galveston tied up and Mike slipped him the puppy. He immediately began making all the usual ooh's and aah's people do when they see a blue-eyed Alaskan husky. He took his new puppy home, and by all accounts, his wife and kids loved the dog and it loved them. That would have been the end of the story except for the other longshoreman standing nearby who witnessed the whole puppy transaction.

He wanted one, too. How much? Mike was stumped. He didn't want to set the price too high, so he made him a deal. Fifty dollars OK? "You know, you ought to keep doing this," Charlie told Mike. "Find some more people down here who want dogs, make this ship the Puppy Express."

And a legend was born. Charlie got

plenty of overtime, the ship's cook wondered why the crew was eating so much more steak than they used to and we were headed to untold riches.

After Mike delivered the second puppy, one of the guys in the SeaLand office wanted one. I said raise the price to \$75 and then \$100. Pretty soon, anybody who hung around the Seattle docks knew Mike was the man to call for a good dog. We sold the whole litter and began taking orders for the summer.

At one point, Mike had three of the little fluffballs on board, all learning the finer points of steak bone etiquette while they offered up, free of charge, hours of slobbery, drooly affection for the lonely old sailor who loved them. Mike figures that run must've been the happiest trip of Charlie's career.

The dog smuggling operation went into dry dock when Mike transferred to another ship. He lost track of Charlie, who no doubt spun some fairly incredible yarns at the Blue Eagle where he spent his retirement evenings.

A ship's master is always responsible for whatever happens on his vessel. But to this day, Mike doesn't know if the captain realized the Galveston was being used as a dog shuttle. The Old Man never said a word. Maybe he didn't like steak.

Meanwhile, if you're ever strolling down by the Seattle wharf some misty morning and happen to run into a bushy-tailed, blue-eyed husky-type, you can be pretty sure you're looking at a dog who traces its lineage five generations back to the first puppies who sailed south on the S.S. Puppy Express.

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TRAVEL

European waterways and canals offer unique travel opportunities into rural areas.

BY CARRI FEASTER
Northern Mirror

Although numerous people travel to Europe and Britain every year, there is one form of sightseeing unknown to many travelers. An extensive network of canals and rivers thread their way through the heart of the countries' green and varied landscape. These can be traveled by canal boats, either on your own or with a crew on board. These boats are specially designed to suit the characteristics of these unique waterways. They are long and narrow with deceptively spacious interiors.

For those travelers who are adventurous, I recommend a self-skippered cruise. No previous experience is necessary, and no special license is needed. All renters are given comprehensive instructions when they arrive and are then equipped to take the helm and go as they please.

Generally, rentals are approximately a week long, and the pace is leisurely. You may cover 100 miles or so in a week, depending on the number of locks on your chosen route and how many stops you choose to make for shopping, sightseeing, etc. Some people choose to cruise all day and others tie-up to explore the countryside. These waterways take you through sleepy little villages, historic market towns and bustling cities. The excursion opportunities are limitless.

The boats themselves come in varied sizes and can accommodate two to 12 passengers. This kind of vacation is ideal for families, couples and groups of all ages. I recommend having at least two reasonably agile adults along for the lock operation. It is not at all complicated and most travelers quickly catch onto the procedure. Yet, it is a strenuous activity and is best suited for two able-bodied people working together.

The boats are fully equipped and become as comfortable as a second home to its inhabitants. The rental company supplies bedding, towels, a full kitchen inventory, cooker, refrigerator, sink, shower, toilet, TV or radio, heating and a large, fresh water tank. You also have the option of having the boat stocked with food provisions at the start of your journey. Later you can make purchases from stores along the way or eat inexpensively in canalside pubs.

For those people who wish to enjoy the charm of the waterways while leaving the work to some one else, there are hotel boat cruises. Passengers can choose for three, four or seven-night itineraries visiting various destinations. These cruises are small and informal, usually accommodating up

See CANALS, Page 11

HEALTH

BY JEANNIE SNODGRASS
Northern Mirror

Last month's column focused on the standard macrobiotic diet. This month, I will explain the view of the macrobiotic diet in relation to balance and health. In macrobiotics, illness is looked at as an imbalance in the body. Food can play a big part in this. Regaining balance is possible with proper food choices.

Macrobiotic philosophy includes a very useful principle for maintaining or regaining health. It is based on the theory that all things in the universe are a balance of opposing but complementary forces—expansion and contraction. In macrobiotic teachings, these forces are called yin and yang. Expansion, dispersion, separation, dissipation and wetness are considered yin tendencies. Contraction, downward and inward direction, dryness, heaviness, and density are yang tendencies. This concept can help us better understand why foods affect us the way they do.

Foods can be classified as either yin or yang (see list) depending on growth characteristics and composition and their energetic effect on the body. Salty foods are contractive, i.e. yang. Root vegetables, such as carrots and parsnips are yang vegetables; they grow deep in the earth and can help us feel grounded.

Leafy vegetables are more expansive, i.e. yin; they grow upward and outward. Similar foods grown in different climates tend to be different, with hot climate foods

more yin and cool climate foods more yang. For example, Hawaiian fruits tend to be yin (juicy and expanded), whereas Alaskan wild berries are more yang (tight and compact).

The balanced foods on the list, from temperate fruits to grains, compose the

macrobiotic diet, with some of the other foods eaten only occasionally or avoided. These balanced foods contain high amounts of vi-

tamins and minerals, good quality protein and carbohydrates, are high in fiber and low in fat, all characteristics which contribute to good health.

Keep in mind that foods are classified in a comparative way, different foods being "more" or "less" expansive or contractive than others. In order to maintain balance, we need both kinds; neither is better or more desirable than the other. The yin/yang classification enables us to determine which foods will be the most beneficial for our current health. Macrobiotic dietary recommendations are individualized and choices and percentages of foods are based on a person's current health condition, age, sex, level of activity, the climate and geographical location in which they live. The outer foods on the list are best consumed in small quantities or avoided. For example, medications may at times be necessary, but food choices can then balance their effect.

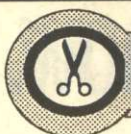
See DIET, Page 10



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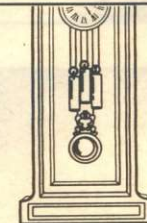
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Once the snow arrived, V remembered why they live in the Yukon. Weekends, snow sport enthusiasts are in force to enjoy all the d the Alaskan winter can offer. C left: ATV races at Big L mean big spills; taking a hot donut break from snow competitor pops a wheelie b motorcycle racers lean into Big Lake ice races; specta Grand Prix on ice; a dieh friend enjoy the fun at the Id kids launch off the perfect Hatcher Pass; drafthorses sleigh rides.

*Photos
by
Ron Caldwell*

**Announced by all the
trumpets of the sky,
arrives the snow.**

**Ralph Waldo
Emerson**



ley residents
in Alaska.
asts turn out
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edding hill at
offer snowy

DIET

Continued from Page 7

Some common examples of complementary foods to bring us into balance follow. A heavy meat eater (yang) can achieve some balance by eating a large amount of vegetables, especially more leafy vegetables (yin) like salads. When overeating an extreme food like sugar, regaining balance may be as simple as eating a bowl of whole grain such as brown rice, which will also provide the B vitamins lacking in sugar.

A healthy balance is not achieved by jumping back and forth between extremes. A diet of meat and sugar is a balance, but not a very healthy one. Likewise, satisfying a craving for sweet or alcoholic drinks caused by eating salty foods is also balance, but again, not a healthy one.

It is possible to eliminate food cravings through health food choices. Without food cravings, weight loss is easier to achieve, which can add to better emotional health. By eliminating many extreme foods and eating more balanced foods, we can feel better in just a few days.

Food preparation is also classified from the most yang to most yin—pickling, deep frying, baking, broiling, sautéing, steaming, boiling, and raw foods. Seasonal cooking means longer cooking times for

winter (more contractive and warming) and shorter cooking times/raw foods for warmer months (more expansive and cooling). Foods which are broken down from a whole food become more yin, which explains why juices are more yin than the fruits or vegetables themselves.

Individual balance depends on what we're trying to accomplish—to heal from an illness, correct a health problem, or maintain good health. By focusing our foods appropriate to our needs, it's possible to enjoy a degree of health that we never thought possible.

There are many books written on this subject. I would recommend the following: Books by Sherry Rogers, M.D.: "Food and Healing" by Annemarie Colbin; "The Cancer Prevention Diet" by Michio Kushi; "Healing From Head To Toe" by Herman and Cornelia Aihara. "Acid & Alkaline" by Herman Aihara compares this Eastern concept with the Western view of acid and alkaline. Understanding both concepts is very important in keeping ourselves balanced.

(Jeannie Snodgrass is a certified macrobiotic counselor and the owner of Jeannie's-The Health Connection in Palmer.)



Photo by Ron Caldwell

Bill Keller improvises his putting through a toilet paper obstacle course at the Mayor's Cup, a Soroptomist fundraiser, held every year.



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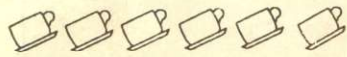
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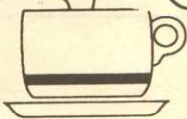
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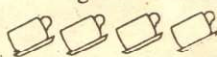
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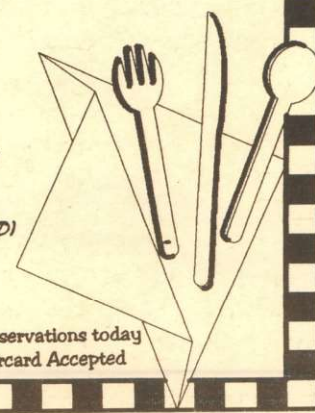
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COMMUNITY FORUM

A listing of noteworthy events

Parking for the Iditarod Restart — on Sunday, March 3 will once again be available courtesy of Wasilla Dental Center at 351 West Swanson Ave. This year, in support of Habitat for Humanity, Mat-Su, parking and warm beverages will be available for donations at the site.

Small Business Support Day for Playground — Wednesday, March 6 has been designated "Small Business Support Day" for the Wasilla Wonderland Playground Project. Volunteers for the project will be visiting Wasilla businesses between noon and 3 p.m. giving information and seeking financial support for the community playground scheduled to be built Memorial Day Weekend.

Women's History Month Luncheon — The Valley Women's Resource Center invites you to attend the Women's History Month Luncheon from noon to 2 p.m., March 8 at the Mat-Su Resort. \$10 per person. RSVP 746-4080.

The Blood Bank of Alaska Needs You — The Blood Bank of Alaska has established a new donation location in Wasilla and is looking for new recruits. The Mat-Su Center is located in the Lakeview Professional Building on Crusey, across from McDonald's, Suite B9. The new schedule is as follows: Tuesday and Wednesday, with appointments, 8-11 a.m. and 1-4 p.m.; Thursdays, 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and 3:30-6:30 p.m. Call 376-1195 for more information.

Habitat for Humanity's New Hours — Habitat for Humanity's new hours are as follows: Monday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 2

p.m.; Wednesday and Thursday, 3-6:30 p.m. Habitat for Humanity is accepting donations of property in support of their program to enable qualified families access to simple, decent housing.

The next general meeting of Habitat for Humanity, Mat-Su is set for 7 p.m., March 18 at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in Palmer. Orientation for those individuals desiring information about Habitat for Humanity services and opportunities for volunteer support will be held from 1-2:30 p.m., Saturday, March 9 at 281 North Main, Suite 102 Wasilla. Additional volunteer office staff is still needed. Hours are flexible; training is free. Call 373-7278 for more information.

Immunization Clinic — Public health nurse Jean Snow will be in Willow for an immunization clinic from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesday, March 13 at the Willow Library. The state of Alaska is now offering hepatitis A injection for children ages 2 to 14 years of age only. It is a series of three injections over a seven-month period. The hepatitis A virus is spread by close personal contact or eating food or drinking water containing the virus.

Jean Snow will also be doing home visits for children's immunizations in the Talkeetna and Trapper Creek area. This also includes well baby and child check-ups and children's Medicaid exams. Call the Wasilla Health Center at 376-2437 to set up an appointment for a home visit. There is no charge for children's services.

Local Resident Selected as Community Hero Torchbearer — Long time Valley

resident, Faye Palin, has been selected as a Community Hero Torchbearer for the 1996 Olympic Torch Relay. Palin is being honored as a community hero for her outstanding volunteer work, community leadership, acts of generosity and kindness and extraordinary accomplishments. She will represent our region by carrying the Olympic Flame on May 6 in the Olympia-Tacoma area in Washington. Beginning on April 27, 5,500 Community Heroes will carry the torch from Los Angeles to Atlanta, Georgia in an 84-day relay to kick off the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games. **Pilot Ground School** — a six-week ground school for pilots will be offered at Wasilla Middle School through community schools beginning March 25. Cost is \$180. Call 373-3373.

Jonni Whitmore to speak at Women's Caucus — Congressional candidate Jonni Whitmore will speak at the next meeting of Valley Women's Political Caucus set for 7 p.m., March 21, at Cottonwood Creek Mall.

Iditarod Artist Jon Van Zyle — will be appearing from noon to 3 p.m. on Sunday, March 3 at the Town Square Art Gallery in the Carrs Wasilla Mall. Van Zyle's works will be displayed including the 20th Commemorative Iditarod Poster, the 1996 Alaska Poster and the 1996 Iditarod print entitled "Catch Me If You Can."

Van Zyle's posters and prints will be available for sale and the artist will be happy to personalize or sign them. For more information call Town Square Art Gallery at 376-0123.

CANALS

Continued from Page 7

to 11 passengers.

These boat trips include full board and service and some side excursions. Most of these boats are renowned for their excellent cuisine. Meals reflect the traditional European fare and regional dishes. Local ingredients are used whenever possible and special dietary requirements can be met when you give the crew advance notice of your needs.

While enjoying this relaxing journey, you can spend your time helping the crew, strolling along the tow path, or sitting comfortably on the foredeck. Depending on the dates you are traveling, fishing with a license is permitted along the waterways.

The best times to go are spring, summer and autumn. Each season has a different benefit for the traveler. May and June are when the country is coming to bloom and the evenings are becoming longer. July and August are, of course, the vacationing months. September is noted as being one of the driest months and October brings about the beautiful fall colors.

These waterways and canals were once one of the most important forms of transportation. They have now been replaced by a vast network of roads and railways. It is nice to see them used once again, not for mass transit, but for the relaxation of the body and soul. This unique means for transportation can take you to the rural heart of the country you wish to travel.

Carri Feaster is a travel agent with Sanctuary Travel in Wasilla.



MEA Budget Billing is available in April

You could pay about the same amount for electricity next winter that you pay this summer if you participate in our Budget Billing program. The program begins in June, but you can sign up for it as early as April.

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WENDT

Continued from Front

zine sales and book orders, he estimates he's made over \$125,000 from his writing career.

Wendt's father homesteaded near Fairbanks in the late '40s and owned a gold mine near Circle. Wendt grew up exploring ghost towns and pulling mastodon tusks out of old tailing piles. The era bordered the edge of the great Alaskan gold rushes, and so Wendt knew many of the old-timers that were the stuff of legends. One of his babysitters was an old dance hall girl, although Wendt was too young to ask many questions at the time. "I didn't even know what a dance hall girl was."

As a youngster, he remembers enjoying English, particularly spelling. "I couldn't wait for spelling tests." In ninth grade, he had one teacher, an older, blue-haired woman, who, he says, was really hard on him. "She made me stay after school. I thought she was a witch, but I'd never had a teacher that cared that much about me."

"She believed in me."

In 1979, Wendt had a great experience that started him on the road to writing. As a young man, he had been a wanderer, looking for gold, mammoth ivory or adventure. "I would spend weeks back in the hills." He kept journals of his travels. Up in Dawson one summer, Wendt met one of his personal heroes, Canadian historian Pierre Burton and wound up having lunch with him.

Burton, born and raised in the Yukon, encouraged the young gold prospector to publish some of his work. "I was already leaning toward that direction because I

liked to tell stories."

Wendt started writing down some of the stories he'd heard growing up, even though

*One of his
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Wendt was too
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many questions
at the time. "I
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those early pieces were pretty rough, he admits. In 1980, he compiled his diaries into a book and printed "An Alaskan Diary in Search of Gold." The book sold 2,000 copies.

Two years later, he took a writing class at Mat-Su College and wound up selling

two stories plus photographs for a total of \$450. (Wendt is an excellent photographer with credits in both state and national magazines.) "It took off from there. I just started putting them out. I found out the more variety you had, the more customers you had to pick from."

Wendt researches endlessly, prowling museum archives, sifting through old newspapers, interviewing the septuagenarians and octogenarians of the state collecting stories, he says, that would otherwise be "long lost."

His latest book has 100 different stories, some only a few sentences; others, like the "The Mystery of the Ruby Gulch Killings," are more developed. "Everything is supposedly true," says Wendt. "Kind of like 'Ripley's Believe It or Not' for Alaska."

Wendt has no intention of quitting soon. "I always have ideas," he says. "I could have another 20 books. The next one is already in the works with a title sure to pique an adventurer's curiosity, "Where to Prospect for Gold in Alaska Without Getting Shot." The book will offer a comprehensive guide to roadside mining that's legal.

After a few more books come out, Wendt would like to try his hand at novels about the Alaskan experience. "There's so many things to write about, it's unending."

And Wendt enjoys what he's doing right now. "It's a challenge. You're creating something, and that's a good feeling. Some people may not like it, but some do, and those are the one that buy it."

RUBY

Continued from Front

was clear that Clark wanted the larger share of Hill and Sandstrom's gold, a breach of agreement.

Hill told his stepson it was time to move on and head back to Anchorage. He told Frank he sensed something was about to happen. It was in the air, you could tell. There was bad blood in the Dutch Hills and things weren't right. Clark wasn't happy about Frank and John moving on.

Frank and John packed up and after a few choice words with Clark, they started on a long tedious journey through the Cache Creek hills. After several hours tramping through the hills and up the gulches, they sat down to take a break on a ridge.

Hill propped his rifle up and noticed a parka squirrel. He thought about shooting it. He paused and fixed his eyes upon the end of the rifle barrel. The barrel had been stuffed with rocks and mud. Frank's also was packed tightly. Had they fired, the rifles probably would have exploded in their faces. John Clark had stuffed the rifles in order to get even.

Eventually making it to the Alaska Railroad, the two flagged down the train and went into Anchorage. A week later they heard the awful news about Dick Francis, Mr. and Mrs. F.W. Jenkins and Joy Britnell being brutally murdered in the lonely hills of the Cache Creek country on their mining claims.

Sandstrom figures if they would have stuck around the area they might have been killed also. It was

See GULCH, Page 13

On my mind...

By Georgia Blackburn

My entire cabin was in chaos. Dirty laundry littered places not meant for their kind. Dust was so thick on the shelves and other flat surfaces, it resembled hoar frost. I'm talking hide under the bed if unexpected company calls. An extreme case of household meltdown; the kind of homestead virus so serious it deadens the senses until you find yourself eating tuna out of a can over the sink with your fingers and decide you just can't live like this anymore.

Miraculously, my awakening dawned on a Sunday that stretched open with nothing else to do but slap this hideous living condition into shape. Weighing the staggering proportions of the job ahead of me, I decided to tackle the heart of the problem first - clean out the fridge and maybe, if there's still enough daylight and I have the guts, the spice cabinet. I've never been known for my rational mind...I rolled up my sleeves...

Being a veteran of the fanatical fridge-fling-it-all, I have learned you must have a game plan. When it gets so bad it earns a major FLING, take no prisoners and always, ALWAYS clean out the fridge door first. The jar of pickled okra with expiration date 1-92 with maybe two of those slimy jewels extracted from the jar was my first blood.

After that, the casualties hit the Hefty bag with amazing speed. My attempt at cranberry ketchup two years ago. O.K., it was an ego thing, but we hated it and, oh, what a bother. Four kinds of barbecue sauce. My summertime mantra will be "Ohmm, Ohmm, I'll make my Ohwn, Ohwn." Six half-empty bottles of my adventures down the salad dressing aisle. I'm a dyed in the wool oil and vinegar gal, but I keep fighting it because, well, it's so boring.

And then there's the great "body" of the fridge. The place you store all those "yummy" leftovers from dynamite meals just consumed. Those freshly made dinner memories you carefully preserve in Tupperware to enjoy longer than a burp and then forget about the next day when you're hankering for something totally tantalizing. I offer you a simple remedy for this store-the-leftover compulsion: When was the last time you woke up at 2 a.m., starving, with the upper half of your body in the fridge saying, "I would KILL for a quarter cup of canned peas right now?" Trust me. FLING IT!!!

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GULCH

Continued from Page 12

known that the Jenkins were unusually late this fall in mid September of 1939. They were usually back in Talkeetna, because the mining season had come to an end.

At first the authorities thought Dick Francis had killed everyone, then shot himself.

Miner John Clark of Talkeetna found the body of Francis as he passed the cabin. Francis was lying on the floor in a pool of blood. There was a revolver in his hand, and Francis had a bullet wound in the head.

U.S. Commissioner Ben Mayfield of Talkeetna was in charge of the investigation. Clark said he had borrowed some tobacco from Francis Sunday afternoon, and the next day he passed by the cabin and called out but got no answer.

Clark opened the door and found Francis on the floor. He then went over to a neighboring prospector named Rockie and told him what he found. Rockie went to Peters Creek and reported it to Pilot Hakon Christensen.

Francis had been in the country since 1905 and had many friends in Anchorage. The pilot had dropped food supplies by the Francis cabin a week before. His cabin was about three miles from the nearest neighbor.

About a mile from the Francis cabin, on a trail leading to the John Clark cabin, the bodies of F.W. Jenkins and Joy Brittell were found. The foot of Brittell protruded from under the grass and leaves which had been used to cover the bodies.

Jenkins carried a pack with a radio inside which he had borrowed from Clark. Brittell was carrying batteries. A 30-30 rifle was found with a broken stock in the nearby creek. Three shells remained in the rifle which had a capacity for seven.

At the Jenkin's cabin, Mrs. Jenkins had made her last diary entry on September 10, the day her husband had borrowed the radio from Clark. She had not been found.

Francis had three dogs. These were used to haul the bodies five miles over the mountains to the Jenkin's cabin through four inches of snow.

The FBI was called in to investigate. Was robbery the motive? The authorities discovered \$5,000 in gold dust hidden in the Jenkin's cabin. Frank Huffman, a caretaker at the Jenkin's camp, found buckskin gold pokes hidden under a pile of wood near the kitchen stove. The Commissioner suggested the \$5,000 represented a summer's cleanup for the Jenkins. An additional 53 ounces valued at \$1,500 was also discovered.

The body of Mrs. Jenkins was found about 150 feet from her cabin on Ruby Gulch. Pockets in her clothing were turned inside out and were taken as proof that robbery was a motive. Searchers had found her body hidden in a growth of grass overhanging a gravel back. It was determined that she had been beaten to death.

It was discovered that Dick Francis had two bullet holes in his head, eliminating the possibility of suicide. A mass murder investigation was underway from that point on.

According to some long time Talkeetna residents, the Jenkins were very successful miners. \$5,000 in gold was an underestimate as to a summer's cleanup. They had been known to stash large amounts of gold around the cabin or nearby in the hills, until they could haul it out in the fall. Some gold was even found stashed in a cabin they owned in Talkeetna. Most believe more gold still lies hidden on Ruby Gulch.

The bodies were concealed with the exception of Francis and the authorities came to the conclusion that the murderer had no intention of taking his own life.

Weapons involved in the murders were sent to Talkeetna to be checked for fingerprints. There were no clues to who the killer was, and there was much speculation.

A caretaker was hired to stay at the camp during the investigation but had to leave because of nerves. There were too many noises being heard around the cabin, driving the caretaker nuts, knowing a killer was still on the loose.

The murders of Ruby Gulch are still talked about today by local old timers. It remains as one of the unsolved mysteries of Alaska.

According to the sister of Joy Brittell, some months later after the killings, John Clark appeared at the door of the Brittell's home in Washington. He asked if the Brittells had taken any photos of himself at any time while they had been in the area.

Throughout the investigation the strangest thing about it was no one questioned John Clark. Not long after the murders, when the dust settled, John Clark was seen struggling on the train in Talkeetna with a large, locked duffle bag. He never returned to his mining claims in the Dutch Hills. Local residents were pretty sure why he left.

PLANNING

Continued from Page 4

limited to just preparing your business plan. A lot of times all a business needs is a facilitator or some strategic planning assistance. Business consultants usually offer a variety of services including facilitating work sessions of management personnel, boards of director or the entire staff of a company. The information from these sessions is then used in preparing for the future of the company. Another important role a consultant can play is that of researching the market, competition or even surveying customers.

Customers can certainly make a difference in the health and well-being of a company. Buying the products is a direct way of helping a business stay in business. Another way is to tell people that a company does a good job. For instance, if you see an advertisement in a certain newspaper or hear an ad on a radio station and it prompts you to use that business, let the business know that the money it spent on the advertising was worth the investment. This is valuable information for the company, because it helps them determine whether or not spending money on advertising will have a direct impact on sales. It is also valuable to the newspaper or radio station in that they receive recognition for being the advertising source.

For those looking at the options for businesses, look carefully at where you are now, where you want to be and ask your customers for their ideas.

(Kay Slack is the owner of Office Contract Services, a business development and consulting firm in Palmer.)

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VALDEZ

Continued from Front

title for the women. She refused to acknowledge that a mistake could destroy, not only her chances to win, but her life.

None of that entered her mind as she took in the breathtaking beauty surrounding her. Instead she thought of how much skiing had enriched her life. "I was thinking the competition really isn't anything," she recalled. "This is what I do. I ski every single day and I love it. And this is like the most incredible setting you could ask for."

Reichhelm watched as one of her fellow competitors shot off the top, heading for narrow gullies and steep, rock lined chutes. She smiled when he sailed off a huge cliff, landed in a splash of powder and skied with grace and power toward the waiting crowd below.

"Everyone was skiing so well, it kind of pumped me up," said Reichhelm. "I knew it was going to be close."

Finally it was her turn. Reichhelm slid into the starting shoot, took several deep, satisfying breaths and pushed off. The powder snow sprayed out in white clouds as she swished and turned, heading for exactly the line she had chosen from the top. Every turn carefully calculated, carefully executed.

She skied toward a band of rocks, launched into the air and landed with perfect form below them in a spray of powder, a bright smile lighting her face. As Reichhelm passed the finish line, she was happy. She'd skied a fantastic run, and she'd had a great time doing it. "This is what extreme skiing is all about," she said later. "The thrill, the excitement, the danger, all combine to make this an incredible sport."

Reichhelm, the 35-year-old skier from Crested Butte, Colorado, learned later that day that her final run had put her in first

place and earned her the title of Women's World Extreme Skiing Champion. In fact Reichhelm earned the triple crown of extreme skiing that year after winning the South American Extremes and the US Extremes in addition to the World Extremes.

Dean Cummings, of Santa Fe, New Mexico, skied with incredible guts, power and control all three days, to capture the title for the men. Cummings, who has skied in WESC since it started in 1991, was thrilled with his first place finish since he'd already walked away with 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th place in preceding years. "With all five, I'm stoked," said a laughing, sun bronzed Cummings.

"My run was so fun. It was powder and sloughing with me."

This March 30-31 and April 1, Valdez will once again play host to 39 of the world's top alpine extremists. Athletes who defy the odds by pitting their skills against the harshest Mother Nature has to offer. Only part of the time is the weather clear, calm and perfect. Often skiers face blowing, drifting snow that makes visibility flat and non-existent. And snow conditions can change dramatically within a few feet.

To enter the competition, skiers must qualify through one of several feeder events such as the US Extremes in Crested Butte, Colorado; the South American Extremes in Las Lenas, Argentina or the Alaska Extremes in Girdwood, Alaska.

Skiers must also provide a resume detailing their skill and experience as an extreme skier and provide a video showcasing their talent. This is not a sport for thrill-seeking maniacs with no regard to safety or life. Extreme skiing is a chance for true, accomplished athletes to face their greatest challenge.

For spectators, extreme skiing offers the ultimate in thrilling entertainment. A chance to see some of the most incredible, heart-stopping action available in the world of sports today, in some of the most spectacular country in Alaska.

Thompson Pass, where the majority of the skiing is staged, is located approximately 30 miles from the picturesque community of Valdez and provides plenty of non-competitor activities as well as a per-

fect venue for viewing all the action.

Don't forget your sunglasses, a comfortable chair and plenty of sunscreen.

For more information about the 6th annual WESC contact Martha Rhue at P.O. Box 3309, Valdez, Alaska, 99686 or call (907) 835-2108. To find out more about Valdez contact the Valdez Convention and Visitors Bureau at P.O. Box 1603, Valdez, Alaska 99686; (907) 835-2984.



Photo courtesy of Emily Gladstone
Extreme skier John Gute from Juneau pushes the outer limit at last year's World Extreme Skiing Championships in Valdez.



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CRAFT

Continued from Page 3

days, says Leavitt, "it was tough making a living on the climbing season and tourism."

Moving to the Valley in 1994 was like "a breath of fresh air," says Leavitt. "Living up there, people always viewed Wasilla as a corridor. They say Wasilla has no soul, but I'm here to tell you I've brought my own."

Nowadays, Leavitt keeps busy with 60-hour weeks, minding the store, making stock ("I'm always making stock. Say I'm making a custom order, in between I try to do some stock.") and caring for his 2-year-old-son. He cuts and punches his leather in a small workroom behind the store and then takes home the material for sewing. He usually starts stitching around 10:30 p.m., after the kids are in bed, and works until 2 or 3 in the morning. When he's not working, he's thinking. "I'm thinking about things all the time."

Despite the extra hours hand stitching requires, Leavitt refuses to use a sewing machine. "One of the reasons I'm still hand-stitching is because the rest of the world is mechanized."

He is one of the few if not the only leathersmith in the state who uses the traditional leather worker's saddle stitch, one thread with two needles going through the same hole, "You don't get any stronger than that. I learned that stitch out of a book printed in Europe when I opened the shop in 1977."

Belts and bags, says Leavitt, are his bread and butter. A simple woman's purse might start at \$90, but some of the more detailed bags are worth much more. A beautiful, bone-colored bag trimmed in sea-foam green braid and bead feathers,

decorated with abalone shells and silver beads, sells for \$300.

Even more precious is a black buffalo hide shield bag, developed for an art show, that has over \$100 worth of antique trade beads sewn on the surface. A woman's tan deer skin poncho with 16-inch fringe and turquoise braiding, maybe studded with old walrus ivory or bone and semi-precious beads, starts at \$325. A turquoise, lambskin dress, on display over the doorway, costs \$300. A fringed, deerskin jacket is \$500. "Actually that's inexpensive," says Leavitt.

Although the items are truly exquisite, Leavitt expects people to use what they purchase from him. Does that mean it's still art? "Yes," says Leavitt. "Because I do a lot of one-of-a-kind pieces. I give my customers what no one else has."

And the practicality of his art has allowed him to support his family. "I don't have my hand out to the NEA, out to the state. I'm not looking for subsidies. For me, it boils down to welfare for artists."

"Either art stands on its own merits or it doesn't."

In the occasional moment when time permits, ("Those times are infrequent jewels," he says.) Leavitt does experience what he calls an "artistic release." He has developed leather sculptures specifically for shows, sometimes alone, sometimes working with another artist. "Actually, doing a show is very good for me. It surprised me by what came out in preparation for this year."

Originally from New York, Leavitt's heritage includes Mohawk and Seneca backgrounds — both tribes were part of the Iroquois nation — but his art, he insists,

has evolved on its own. "I'm in no way trying to replicate anything."

"I create."

Yet, his Indian background does seem to exert a strong influence on his work, he concedes.

One impressive work he designed with artist Ed Wick called "When Memories Make the Heart Sing," drawn on deerhide, depicts an old man on a willow rest looking at a scene of himself as a young man on a buffalo hunt.

Leavitt has also made a series of standing or walking sticks, not intended to recreate anything traditional, he says. "Just something I did." The sticks, cut from Alaska spruce, are wrapped in deerskin, tipped with iron and adorned with fringe, feathers and paintings.

Once driving through Talkeetna looking for sticks, Leavitt spotted a torqued spruce that looked like it was bending in the wind. He started working with it, but the piece wouldn't come together. With a show deadline approaching, he finally wrapped it in chocolate deerskin, added simulated hawk feathers and called it, "Hawk in the Wind." People loved it, but at \$375, it didn't sell.

The following fall, a pastor and his wife who had seen the piece that summer came back looking for the stick. A new bishop, who was part Choctaw, would soon be ordained, and the pastor said it was a tradition in his church to give a staff to an incoming bishop. "So they bought it," says Leavitt, delighted by the meaning behind the sale.

He has created only one piece of social commentary art, a decorated moose jaw wrapped in smoke-tanned moose hide and

red deer suede that appeared to be a dangerous weapon. With an iron spear tip, simulated eagle feathers, teeth stained red and a jaw that's been died black, Leavitt tried to make the piece look as mean and ferocious as he could. "When you look at this thing, it looks like a real man-killer, but the problem is you could use it only once because a moose jaw is hollow and very fragile."

That's why he named the piece, "IT'S-A-THRO-A-WAY-SO-SIGH-IT-TEE." The piece is now in a private collection.

Recently, Leavitt has included his musical interests in his pursuit of a living through his art. He plays harmonica and percussion with a five-piece group called The Crossroads Bands that performs a variety of music, classical, rock, rhythm and blues and country. So far, he's spent more for a new harmonica than he's made for a single gig, but he expects that to change.

And in January, he started a three-hour radio program called Kenny's Blues on KMBQ from 8-11 p.m. every Sunday that plays great blues music. "Real music for real people," says Leavitt. If the show takes off, he plans to form Tail Dragger Productions that will provide musicians and bands for entertainment events.

At the moment, Leavitt's not sure where all this is heading. He's hoping the musical productions will free up some of his hours at the shop so he could spend more time on his art. But even after all these years, he says, he still loves working with the leather. He loves playing music too, so Leavitt feels life has been pretty good to him.

"How much better can it get?" he smiles. "I work at what I love."

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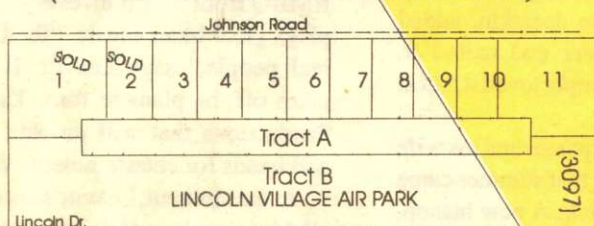
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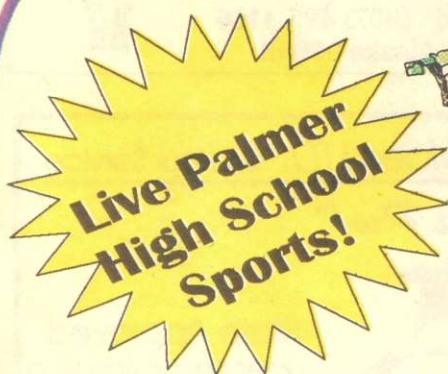
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